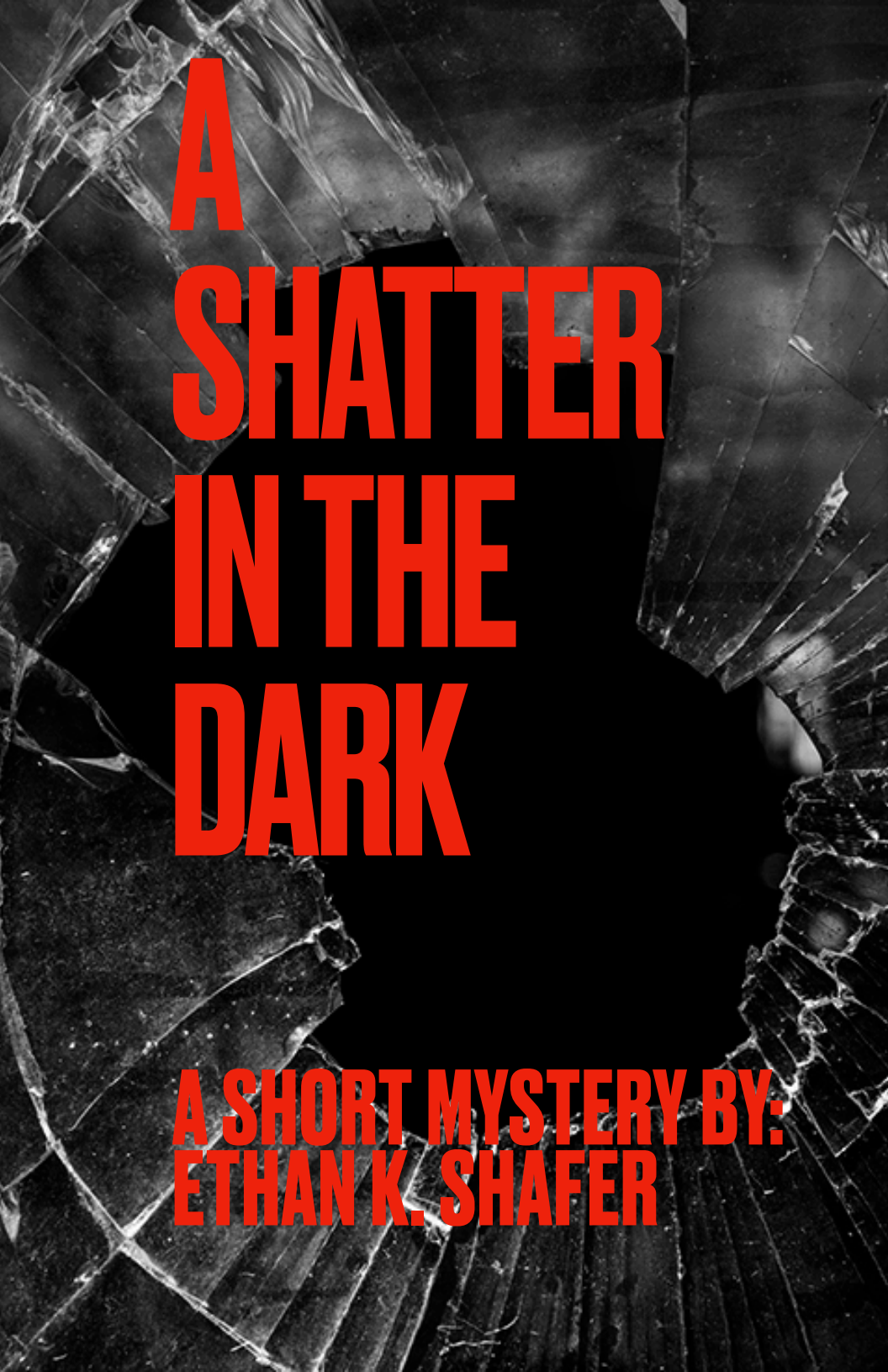
A SHATTER IN THE DARK
A SHORT MYSTERY BY:
ETHAN K. SHAFER

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Will Luke Survive?

In Memory of Mr. Swofford. Died of reading too many words.

On Harmelinck Street, just a few miles past the maple grove of Beverly Hills, stood a house with bushes and mulberries. They were dormant as it was the fall season. Inside the brass door of the house was a 12-year-old boy named Luke. His parents died 5 years ago, but he secretly lived alone in “his” house. The police liked him for his intelligence in solving mysteries.

Luke was at his kitchen table eating a bowl of Cherrios™.In front of him was a cork board with scraped *missing person* reports from the local *Swell Explorer* newspaper tied together with red twine string. It was strange how they were all located around Harmelinck Street.

After finishing his hearty breakfast, he briskly climbed up the creaky stairs. With every step was a new pitch of squeak.

Upon entering his tidy, clean room, he sat in his shiny wooden chair.

Looking about 4 feet up, he saw his wall covered with newspaper clippings hung by old tacks.

“Seems this has been going on for years,” Luke said as he stroked his chin.

If you aren’t aware, he is a young, super-intelligent kid who has solved several mysteries in the past.

This was his first long case. To ease his thinking, he would often walk down a gloomy avenue adjacent to his house. Here, the only sounds were the wind rustling in the leaves.

“Wonder what these old businesses are up to today,” remarked Luke.

He was looking up at the tall and old buildings with signs in the windows. The businesses he was talking about were office buildings located right in front of a neighborhood. These facilities were here for medical & financial purposes.

Many times, he took a daily stroll on the sidewalk in front of them. He mostly paid attention to the signs and promotions in

the windows. The only one that didn’t have any windows was the financial office.

Luke thought it was weird that the black tile office had no windows, except for the one on the very top. He couldn't think about that now; he had to solve a murder mystery.

When he reached the front porch of his house, he suddenly heard the ear-piercing sound of tires screeching on the road and a woman screaming.

“Aaaaaaaa!!! Somebody help!” blasted the invisible woman.

Luke sprinted faster than ever before down the gloomy avenue. There, he found a woman screaming in her tall front lawn.

“Awwaa! A, ch, ch, ch, ch, chku.” chocked the woman.

She lethargically fell to the ground. Luke stood there in horror. Nearby neighbors gathered around. About three minutes later, a blaring ambulance appeared on the site.

Luke couldn't bear the chilling horror of the incident. He jogged down the Avenue to his house on the other side.

Sometime after the woman died, the local paper boy for the *Swell Explorer* chucked the weekly paper to the wooden door steps of Luke's house. When Luke heard the smack, he arose from his chair in his room and proceeded to the front door.

The headline on the paper was a rather…unfortunate one. It read: "Woman dead on lawn! Several witnesses."

He took the page from the paper containing all the information on the crime. He started excitedly creeping up the stairs.

Suddenly, Luke heard a fierce crashing of glass below him. His heart began madly pounding. He slowly stepped on one stair after the other as he was going down.

What he witnessed horror struck him. A 6 1/2 foot man was grinning at him with a rough shave through the outside of Luke's window. A black car with busted tires was behind the strange man.

"Sad day." He exclaimed in a mix of New Yorker/Western accent.

"For-for what," Luke asked in a shaking voice.

The man grimly extracted a brown bottle from his belt. It was labeled… POISON!!!

“Don’t you want to figure out what this dose is?” the man scarily asked the nervous Luke.

Without warning, a black guy yelled from down the street.

“Hey! You over there, scum!” Shouted the new man.

Luke looked out the unbroken window on the other wall. He was paying so much attention to the black man down the road that when he turned his head to see what the man with the poison was doing, Luke only saw his car skidding on down the road, leaving exhaust on the lawn.

The black man looked both ways and then quickly ran across the street to the shattered window.

“You ok son?” he questioned.

“Uh, ye-yea,” replied Luke

The man pulled out his white phone.

Mmmmm, bee boo boo. Luke instantly recognized this pattern. He knew the man was calling 911.

Two minutes later, police cars were at the side of the road next to Luke's house. While officers were talking to the black man, a forensic officer asked Luke to describe the car that the man had.

"Well, I didn't get a good glimpse of it because I was scared. But it was black with a stripe of red on it." Luke reported to the forensic officer.

The officer then took some notes on his long notepad. He then walked away as he stressfully said, "Go take a walk, kid."

Even though Luke wanted to find out what had happened to that woman, it would have been nice to stay outside and take a walk. Luke sprinted down the paved sidewalk covered with purple and orange leaves. He had entered the avenue he knew too well.

After turning the corner, he saw the black financial office (which was converted from a big house). He looked at a man coming out of its front doors. He had a soft face and dazzling eyes as if crystals were incaged in them. Following the man was a 57-year-old lady. She was wearing a wrinkled dress with a diamond necklace. Luke knew this woman's name was Marlin Bell. Marlin

was a certified accountant for the local bank. She chose that old house as her office.

“Hiya there!” she happily said across the street as her client left.

Luke got stiff with fright for a second as he looked at her. He then eased when she showed him her smile. He still made a start to the steps where she was standing.

As he reached the step to enter the building, she enthusiastically said, “Hello! What’s your name?”

“Luke,” responded Luke.

“Come inside, Luke!” she said as she welcomed him.

When he entered, he noticed everything was bland. The walls were gray with nothing on them. It leads down a hallway that had many doors. Before the hallway sat a desk with a clock on the ceiling above it. Chairs were pushed into each side of the middle desk. Papers were scattered all over.

“Sit right here,” she happily commanded as her long fingernails pointed to the chair in the front of the desk.

Luke sat.

“Would you care for a cup of tea?” Marlin asked.

“Sure,” wearily exclaimed Luke.

Marlin walked over to a white, electric tea kettle on a table with sugar cubes beside a line of tea boxes.

She kicked off the conversation by starting with, “What were you doing running down the road looking all scared?”

“Somebody…attempted to break into my house. Well, they only broke a window.”

“Oh. Really, what time?”

“Maybe about, let’s say, five minutes ago.”

Marlin came around from the tea table into the other chair and gave Luke a paper cup containing tea.

“Really,” she continued.

“Yep.”

“That sounds horrible. Did you or anybody get hurt?”

“No, but I was pretty shaken up.”

“Poor little thing.”

They sat in silence as Luke drank his tea for a while.

“If you ever need to talk, just find me ***during*** business hours when I’m not helping a client. But ***never*** come after hours! Do you understand?”

“Yes.”

They both stood up as Luke threw the paper cup in the trash. He exited out the door when Marlin reminded him to “Come again!”

Luke shuffled his feet down the sidewalk back towards his house. It was starting to be a sunny but cold and windy autumn noon with more leaves falling on the sidewalk. He observed the two-story houses with shrubbery in the front beside the frosted road.

He thought deeply about all of the murders located around Harmelinck Street. Was he being targeted, or was it just a coincidence? But how? How did the woman die? Then, an important thought popped into Luke's mind. The newspaper!! He got so distracted that he forgot the paper! He raced down the

slippery road. He didn't care if he stumbled. He had to find what caused the tragedy.

When he turned the corner of his street, only one police car and one policeman were at the side of Luke's house. The policeman had a well-shaved beard and had on a sheriff hat, who was standing by the steps. As Luke got closer to the man, the sheriff recited, "Um, so we've found that over eleven crimes have happened near this house. We are offering a police protection option. When your parents get home, ask them."

Luke froze. He didn't have any parents. What would he say?

"How would you protect?" Luke quietly asked.

"An armed police vehicle would be positioned right outside your house. Then, if somebody tries something, an officer will interact. But several other people in the neighborhood have already agreed."

"My parents say they don't need police. They have guns," interjected Luke. "They probably wouldn't agree."

“Be sure to ask them if they're sure. If they change their mind, they can call me at the police office. Also, we put some tarp on the window so there is not a big hole.”

The officer hopped into the seat of his car and drove off.

Luke bolted past the front door of his house and upstairs into his clean room. Finally, he had a chance to uncover the fatal mystery.

He excitedly sat on his shiny chair. Peering down at the place he set the newspaper, his mouth gaped open. The paper was missing!!!

He scrambled off his chair. He looked under his desk franticly, searching for his paper.

He glanced at his window. The entire window was gone! Maybe he could add that to his board.

At that time, he was freaking out. The suspicion that his house was being targeted grew a little more at that moment. He paced over to the rectangle-shaped hole and looked out of it. As his

brown hair hung out the window, Luke heard the sharp cry of some sort of siren. It was a continuous high pitch.

He snapped his head back inside, facing his blue computer on his desk. He paced back to his desk and then clicked on the *emergency alert* notification. The speakers talked to him in a stern voice. “Attention! May we have your attention, please! The National Weather Service has issued a storm surge alert for the following counties: *Kenn, Los Angeles, Ventura, Orange, and San Bernardino.* It is highly recommended that anybody in those proximities take shelter immediately in a safe location. Try to put as many walls between you as possible. If you are on the road,”

Luke didn’t stick around for the rest. He flung himself out of his room and down the stairs. Put as many walls between you as possible. Put as many walls between you as possible, Luke chanted to himself.

He was planning where to go. The house was old and creaky. It has only barely survived an earthquake, let alone a strong storm surge.

Nimbly, he hopped back up the stairs as a gigantic boom of thunder roared. The reason he was going back up to his room was all of his newspaper clippings and clues were in there. If he didn't get them, he would never figure out the mystery. He sprinted across the carpet in his room. He ripped all of the three long corkboards with the clues out of the wall.

Since the studs were deep in the wall, the wall started to crack. The ceiling soon began crumbling. A big bang let out from above him. But it didn’t sound like thunder.

From above him, the light lost power and aimed right at Luke’s head.

With all three of the brown boards in his arms, he graciously lept out of the way from the heavy fixture falling.

Because of all of his adrenaline, he jumped too far. Farther than ever before. His body was going to go through the window! He tried to dodge it by swinging his body horizontally. Instead of falling to the floor, as he expected, his heels slammed against the window frame. His body flew like a bird out the window.

He dropped his precious boards to the green grass. With one hand, Luke grasped the bottom part of the window. The other hand was swaying in mid-air. When he grabbed onto the frame, it gave him a fierce jerk. The sudden jerk caused him to let go and do a backflip in the air. His back slammed on the now-cracking siding.

Luke's body pounded on the ground while he slowly lost consciousness.

One Day Later

Luke’s eyes slowly opened. His pupils slowly adjusted to the vibrant light. Where am I? What happened? He asked himself. Now that his eyes were fully opened, a chunk of brick was

smashed into the grass about 2 feet away from his torso. In a matter of seconds, upon seeing this, his nerves kicked in. Under him, it felt like a mush that he was submerged in. He turned his aching head slowly to his left side. A dark green grass covered a wide area.

When Luke tried to stagger up, he had a bad aching all over, especially in his back.

After a painful and vigorous process, he was standing. He looked a little weird because his muscles were tense. Luke felt faint.

He knew he needed help. The closest place to receive it was the doctor's office the adjacent avenue. A man named Dr. Chong was the only staff there. Luke limped like a robot over to the street corner.

The medical office was an actual office (unlike the financial office). It was a tan, one-story office located beside the financial office. Dr. Chong, what is a skinny Asian man in a white coat.

Luke stumbled onto the sidewalk in front of the main doors of the office.

When he opened the door, he smacked the ground in the waiting room as his mind saw white.

A Short Period Later

Luke's eyes saw a bright white light as the shadow of a man appeared. As soon as Luke's eyes focused, Dr. Chong was staring at him to the side. The light suddenly moved up and then away. Luke was in the doctor's office.

A stone wall with fluorescent lights on the ceiling greeted Luke. Granite counters with medicine bottles were all around the sides of the room. One counter had a sink.

“Hello, hello?!” rudely exclaimed Mr. Chong.

“Uh,” Luke moned back.

“How many fingers am I holding up?”

“Four.”

“Can you try standing up?”

Gradually, Luke got to his feet.

“What is your name?” Mr. Chong demanded.

“Luke.”

“Do you feel dizzy, Luke?” sternly asked the doctor.

“My muscles are tight,” whined Luke.

“What were you doing!?” Frustratingly requested Dr. Chong.

“Uh, I, I, I, I don’t know.” quietly Luke said.

The doctor walked over to one of the counters with pill bottles. He carefully drew out one of them, then walked back over to Luke. While the doctor was walking, Luke took a glance through the crack of an open cupboard. A brown bottle with a label

that had the end letters O*N* on it in italicized letters caught his eye. He was in some sort of trance.

Luke exited the trance when he heard the doctor cry, “Here!” As he thrust the medicine at him. Luke Worley grabbed it.

“Do you have any way to pay for your medical expenses?” Dr. Chong grumpily asked.

Luke thought of his money in the bank. He had that.

“how much will it be?” Luke answered as he swallowed the cherry-flavored tablet.

“It will be $50,” irritatingly said the doctor.

“But I don't have anything on me currently.”

“Do you have any money elsewhere?”

“Yes, in a bank account.”

“Huu! Go over to the financial office and make a withdrawal.”

Luke hopped off the chair. The medicine was making him feel much better and less lightheaded. He journeyed outside to the financial office.

He transitioned over to the black financial office. He carefully cracked the splinter door open. There was a metal handle on the door so he wouldn't get hurt by a splinter. He popped inside, and a flash of nostalgia rushed through him. The desk with the messy papers lay all over. And the tea table. With its rows of different kinds of tea. In front of the walkway was a sign, almost like a podium. Lying under the plastic shield, a piece of paper with printed text that read, *Serving another client in another room! Please wait here.*

Luke leaned against the wall while he waited for Marlin and her client to come out.

After waiting a long five minutes, he thought. Why have the doctors been so rough & stern with him? And what was that brown bottle?

An alarming thought flew straight through his intelligent mind. That bottle looked exactly like the bottle that the man had shown him when he broke the window of Luke's house! Plus, it had the *ON* on part of it.

His thought bubble popped as soon as he heard footsteps coming from the northeast corner that was hidden by rooms in the hallway. Out of the corner, Marlin appeared.

“Oh, hello!” she cried happily.

“Hi!” shyly shouted back Luke.

As Marlin got closer, Luke felt more comforted.

“I need to make a withdrawal of $50.” he declared.

Marlin stopped walking and said, “Welp, over here!” she exclaimed, pointing into one of the rooms.

Luke easily walked to her. As he walked down the hallway, his eyes squinted through the door cracks into the other rooms. They were mostly old and looked the same. They had blinded windows that shown into the dusty rooms. The strangest thing, though, was that all of them had a gray desk and filing cabinet scattered around. When he was almost at Marlin, who was wearing a diamond necklace, a room at the end of the hallway caught his keen eye.

A label next to the door at the end of the hallway said: *Room #28: Filing Room 1*. But wait, all the other rooms had filing cabinets in them. Why would you need a filing room?

Luke ignored this for now for the sole purpose of paying back the angry Mr. Chong.

Marlin welcomed him into a room that looked like the other ones, except there was a computer on the desk. It also had a tall lamp, a ledger, and a checkbook in front of it.

Luke immediately realized to sit down in the chair at the front of the desk. Luke asked in a polite voice for a $50 check from his account. As Marlin was writing the check, Luke observed that her browser was open on the computer. Most of the bookmarks either had the *Facebook, Instagram, TikTok,* or any other social media logo.

He transitioned back to the doctor's office. Dr. Chong seemed to be expecting him because he was right at the door. Luke miserably approached him, knowing that the doctor would harass him with the words. Luke handed him the check.

“Scram! You stupid kid!” Screamed Dr. Chong. The doctor got close to Luke's face and said, “Never look in my cabinets!!”

“But they were half opened,” whined Luke.

“Get out!!!” he blasted. Now, some people are opening their windows from their houses down at the facility.

The doctor looked up at them with an angry look on his face, then went inside.

Luke desperately walked away in disbelief. His home was unlivable. He couldn't find out how the woman died. His corkboards were missing. Now was a very depressing time for him.

As he came onto the street, he saw the forensic officer who asked him questions carrying a large piece of paper. He was starting to cross the street from the other side. When the officer was about halfway across the street, he stopped and exclaimed, “Are you ok? Did your house survive the storm? It looked pretty old.”

Luke also stopped and said, “No, it didn't. The last thing I remember after that was that I was on my lawn.”

“How is your house?” carried on the officer.

A loud bang, such as a car door slamming, thundered from behind Luke. It was scarily accurate how they turned their heads to look behind them. Luke then resumed the conversation by replying with, “It’s completely uninhabitable!”

Abruptly, a blue convertible sped around the corner. In a flash, the officer got hit and slid on the car hood. He then flew off it and smacked on the ground. It was honestly very stupid that they were standing in the middle of the street.

Luke heard car tires screeching as the convertible turned around and headed right for him.

He jumped onto the soft grass. The car sped away out of the avenue.

People from the surrounding houses, as well as Marlin, came out when Luke checked the officer's pulse and then yelled, “Somebody call 911!!!”

Soon enough, emergency vehicles were arriving at the scene. Several paramedics rushed over to the dying officer.

Policemen were ushering Luke into one of the police cars so they could get to the station. On the way there, an officer was filling out a form on his clipboard. He asked questions like: What's your name? How old are you? And things like that.

But when he asked who Luke’s legal guardians were, Luke bombed.

“I don't have one.” he sheepishly said.

The officers turned their heads and told him that they would need to contact the closest relative. But he would have to sleep at the station tonight so they could ask him questions about the murder.

They arrived at the station at about 5:00 PM. The gates opened as the car passed through them.

Upon entering the station, a woman in a corner, sitting at a desk, was typing on the computer and filling out stacks of paper. The officers who drove Luke let him past her.

They turned into a hallway with five offices on each side. The walls in the hallway were made of glass, so you could see

inside each of them. Each room was tidy but gloomy. The lamps inside the offices kind of brightened everything up.

One of the officers lead Luke into his office. It looked about the same as the others, except there were some more counters.

“Alright then,” blandly said the officer. “Tell me who did it. Describe them. Then tell me why you think they did it.”

“I think Dr. Deven Chong. I probably don’t need to describe him because he owns an office. After the car hit the other officer, Dr. Chong was the only one to not come out of his office.”

“Are you sure he wasn't helping a patient?”

“No. But when I was in his office, there was a brown bottle that had the end letters *ON* at the end of the label. The bottle looked exactly like the one the man had that broke the window of my now-destroyed house. When I left, he got real close to me and said, ‘Never look into my cabinet again!’”

The officer typed down some notes. He took Luke out of the office and down the hallway. After taking a left turn into a large corridor with a sign above it stating, S*leeping Quarter*.

“This is where you are going to sleep tonight. Let me show you your room.” explained the officer.

He walked Luke through the corridor, where all of the bedrooms were. It was a medium-sized hallway with wide doors leading into the average-sized bedrooms.

At the end of the hallway, a big, colorful stained glass window had a picture of a Grand Canyon on it. It was hard to distinguish as it was nighttime.

Luke's room for the night was somewhat great quality. A bed sat in the middle with nice sheets and fringy pillows. A closet laid in the side wall. A tan dresser was facing the bed. It had a lamp with silk cloth alongside it. A one-bulb chandelier hung from the ceiling almost over the foot of the bed.

“Extra clothes are in that dresser.” The officer said, pointing. “Food Will be delivered by the cook to your room. Your

room number is *S–103*. Go make yourself comfortable. Food should be here shortly."

Luke sat on the bed as soon as he was in the threshold of the room. Routinely, he would usually ponder around, examining everything that crossed his path. This time, he didn't. He sat as if you were waiting. Not for dinner, but there's something else.

Half an hour later, a red-haired woman wearing a hairnet, also wearing a blue shirt, opened the door with a food tray in front of her. To Luke, it only seemed like five minutes! The lady handed him a tray of cheesy bread, chili, and a glass of water. He sat there in silence, eating at a slow pace.

Luke awoke the following day in his fringy bed. His elegant room looked the same but did not feel the same. He felt like he had a rush of something through him. A rush that made him think he could solve mysteries in a matter of seconds.

He sprang up from the mattress and hurried to the front of the dresser. After getting the clothes on or in the dresser, he departed from the room and into the corridor. There, he hastily

walked to the hallway with the offices. He took a big step into the office that he was interrogated in the day before.

“What happened to Mr. Chong?” Luke requested.

“He’s now in jail. All of the things you said checked out. We still need to go over to the crime scene so we can analyze the specifics.” asserted the officer.

2 1/2 hours later, they were driving down the icy autumn road. The two passed by Luke's crumbled house and turned down the adjacent avenue.

Orange cones, along with yellow police tape, line from the beginning of the medical office toward almost the end of the street.

They waited in the car whilst the officer radioed more officers to come to the scene. Over the span of two minutes, five cars appeared! It seemed this was a really important case.

All of the officers and Luke met up where the crosswalk was located. A white outline of a man lying on the ground was drawn out with spray paint. It seemed that it was made the night before.

After some more forensic officers showed up, the whole group walked to the front doors of Mr. Chong's office.

A handful of the forensic officers explained to Luke what they were going to do to investigate inside.

“You're going to show us where that cupboard with the bottle is.” the officers kindly explained to Luke.

One officer carried a Velcro bag straight up to the front door, where the lock was. When he unraveled the bag, tools that looked a lot like small screwdrivers were strapped together by the Velcro strap. But the end was like an octagon, but pointy. He jammed it vertically in the lock. He then used a needle-like device and poked it above the screwdriver tool. After some nifty work of wiggling the tools, a click indicated that the lock was *un*locked.

The interior was pitch black, like a haunted house.

“Go switch the main breaker at the back of the building.” ordered an officer.

Soon enough, white fluorescent lights lit up.

As long as the whole day, the team searched the facility. The only room that Luke helped investigate was the examination room. When another one of the officers took out the brown bottle from the cabinet, I didn't say *POSION* like Luke expected, it said *NEW ANTICIDAMINIPHINE*. Carefully, the officer placed the bottle snuggly in a case shaped like a bottle. That case would be shipped off to a lab to make sure that it wasn't poison.

Hours later, it was late dusk. The fluorescent lights made a shadow of the door on the sidewalk. The whole group had met up in the middle of the waiting room.

All at once, a muffled screeching sound omitted from all of the officers' radios. The person speaking through the radio gave lots of codes that Luke barely understood. He only understood one code, which he believed meant *fire*. Following this announcement, the officers scurried out of the door, except for one.

The officer touched Luke's shoulder and uttered to him importantly.

“Ok. There is a fire at the *Wilshire Grand Center*. They are dispatching every officer and fire truck. Yet, I can't take you with me. How about you go over to the financial office to ask for Mr. Chong's financial record.”

At the end of their talk, the officer sprang into his car, and he hastily drove down the roadway.

Luke's option was to go to the financial office.

Luke ambled onto the walkway outside the offices. As he was walking down the sidewalk, he witnessed a terrifying sight.

It was hard to say what he saw because it was dark and icky outside, but it was petrifying. The top window of the financial office burst out in shards of glass. A man had catapulted through the window. And had duct tape over his mouth. He flew almost to the sidewalk.

The man smacked on the grass. He was a deadly idol. Luke ran over to the duck-taped man. He knelt beside the dead body. The only description Luke could tell was that the man was over 40. *Bang!!!* A metal tool slammed on the back of Luke's brown hair.

Luke grunted as his eyes opened at a slow pace. The sound of chains clinking was the first thing he heard. He saw a blur of gray with the blur of a blue humanoid figure in front of a door. As his eyes focused, he saw tall racks which stood to the left of him. The racks had buckets that were tilted and had files in them.

The humanoid figure was Marlin. She had a rich grin on her face.

Luke tried to make a move, but his arms ached badly. He glared up at his hands. Black cuffs locked his hands to gray chains.

“Well, hello there, Luke.” She said, in a grinning manner. “I’ve been waiting for you.”

“For what?”

“For me to finally kill you. You see, all the time, I know who you were. And I knew that you try to solve murders. I know that soon you'll catch on to my schemes. I've been trying to come up with numerous plans on how I can kill you. And I noticed that if I try to get on your good side, then it would be easier. I spent over

six years trying to come up with a good plan. Those murders that you're trying to solve, those are my doings."

"Why? And how?"

"I come from a long line of murders in my family. They were good at what they did, but none were up to my standards. I can kill 12 people in 10 years. They could only kill six in 12 years."

"You monster!"

"I do it for the pleasure. Well, also the riches but mainly the pleasure. The way I do it makes me have a rush. Do you know that one time you came over to make a withdrawal? The reason you heard that stopping sound was because I came up from the basement. There, I keep the people that I want to kill. I say, if they don't forward me all of the money in their accounts, I hurt their loved ones. After I kill them off, I steal their phones. I'll look up the passwords to their social media accounts and continually post only text. This way, nobody gets suspicious, and I never get caught.

“How do you kill them?”

“I’m not telling you that! It's a family secret. Back to how I'm killing you. The fire at Wilshire Grand Center gave me a perfect opportunity. I wanted to get your attention somehow. So, I took the person that I was gonna kill in two days and chucked them out the window. When you were checking on him, I came up behind you and made you pass out by hitting you with a shovel.”

“But where am I?”

You're in *Room #29: Filing Room 2*. The one just above the first one.

“How are you going to kill me?”

“This room is in the very back of the building. If there were to be a fire, even if you did break the chains, the rest of the building would be on fire. And you would have no escape.”

“You're going to burn this building with me in it?”

“Well, I did want to kill you. Didn't I? This is a way where I have time to escape. I also took the liberty of disabling all the fire alarms so nearby households wouldn't notice until your dead.”

Marlin pulled a small lighter out of her pocket. The sound of her lighting it ring around the room.

“Sweet dreams, Luke!” She emphasized.

The woman took the lighter and left a file with the name *Simon Haze* labeled on it. She walked outside of the room and shut and locked the door.

The blaze increased, now spreading to the other side of the rack.

After some time passed by, one and a half racks were rapidly burning. Luke rapidly shook his hands back and forth to make an effort to get out. Surprisingly, a chunk of wall dismounted. Retched his arms downward. But he was still trapped. His cuffs were in the chains that were attached to the chunk of wall.

He mounted his foot in the middle of the chunk and pulled in a formerly impossible way. The cuffs and chains snapped at his face. A throbbing pain ran up it.

He darted over to the side of the room that wasn't engulfed in flames. He gripped two of the bins and dumped the contents out of them. He then put it on the end of the shelf that was half on fire. He did this so he wouldn't burn himself. He used the bins and shoved the rack straight ahead into the first rack, and then it slammed the door down.

So the racks wouldn't be in the way, he propelled it to the side of the hall. It wasn't an easy escape, seeing as all of the door frames that lead down the hall had been lit on fire. Luke did a quarter turn, so his right arm was parallel with the end of the hall. He took careful steps so he wouldn't lose his balance.

At the end of the hallway, the stairwell appeared. Well, not really. Smoke covered all of the steps. Luke put his mouth in his shirt. He bravely set foot on the first step. After the stretch of time, his foot had touched the finishing step.

At the bottom, a thick, black smoke covered everything. Only fragments of orange light shown through the thick black smoke. Luke looked around. He faced the door right beside him. It

had a sooty sign that read: *Janitor*. Swerved into the mysterious *janitor*'s room.

He flipped a switch as a light flickered on. It soon stabilized and had a dim glow. To the side of Luke, set a white water boiler with pipes running up and down the ceiling, which were connected to it. Out of the blue, a swift steam shot out from one of the pipes. Luke could feel it on his shoulder. A rumbling noise birthed inside the boiler.

Sharply, Luke realized it was going to blow! He jumped back out of the room as the steam got more rapid.

He spun around on his heels so he wouldn't be facing the water boiler. A square window with abreast to the steaming boiler. That window was Luke's only hope of surviving. He was going to jump out of it. He took a short amount of time to think about how he should jump.

A high-pitched sound gave forth from the *janitor*'s room. He had no time. He took his chances and sprang out the window. The glass shattered all over him. His feet were nearly out when a

monstrous explosion of fire immersed the whole building. Luke was sadly in that range.

The Following Day

A full search had been conducted on the burnt-down building. Luke's body had not been found. Neighborhood cameras showed that Luke had not escaped.

That leaves plenty of unanswered questions. Where did Marlin go? What was that bottle that Mr. Chong had? And the most important question of all… **Did Luke survive?**

The End